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Supplement Your Knowledge

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By **Cmdr. Connie Scott, registered dietitian, [Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center](#)**








It seems like talk about dietary supplements are everywhere. If you listen to television and radio advertisements, all you have to do to achieve your physical and psychological health goals is walk into your local supplement store and pull out your credit card. Whether you want to build muscle, lose weight, increase your energy levels, increase your libido, boost your mood or prevent disease, there's a pill, drink, extract, gel cap, or powder to help with whatever you are seeking to improve or prevent. With the exponential growth in new products, it is a difficult market to navigate from a health, wellness and safety standpoint, and as a registered dietitian I get many questions about dietary supplements.

In support of June's theme of Men's Health Month, it's never too late to discuss the importance of supplements and men's health. Most men are in pursuit of good health, weight management, and optimal physical and mental performance. Most are also well aware of the positive impact physical activity, healthy diet and healthy behaviors, such as stress management and avoidance of tobacco and excessive alcohol use impact these goals. Increasingly, men are also turning to dietary supplements to enhance their health efforts. In fact, a recent survey shows that 46.4 percent of men over the age of 19 who use supplements do so "to improve overall health."¹ While improving overall health is always an excellent goal, it turns out you may not need to spend your hard-earned money to get the benefits of many common supplements.

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What is a dietary supplement?

Dietary supplements include any product taken by mouth that contains a “dietary ingredient” intended to supplement the diet. These ingredients may include macronutrients (carbohydrates, proteins and fats), vitamins, minerals, herbs or other botanicals, amino acids, and substances such as enzymes, organ tissues and hormones.²

Do I need dietary supplements?

Maybe not! Some dietary supplements have been shown to be beneficial to overall health, such as various multi-vitamins and omega-3 fatty acids³, but almost all of the substances we seek out in supplement form are found in nature, i.e. the food and beverages you consume on a regular basis. Not only are they typically lower in cost, they also come packaged in a form that tastes good! Below are some examples of components men commonly seek out in dietary supplements to improve their health. Included in the list are foods and beverages that also contain the components:

- **BCAA (Branched Chain Amino Acids).** Claim – BCAAs enhance exercise performance, prevent fatigue, reduce muscle breakdown and improve recovery. 16 oz. of skim milk or 3.5 oz. of tuna will provide the same amount of BCAAs as 6 capsules (one dose) of BCAA supplements.
- **Quercetin.** Claim – Quercetin acts as an antioxidant and anti-inflammatory, prevents cancer and improves heart health. Quercetin is one of the most abundant flavonoids found in nature, primarily in fruits, vegetables, nuts and some spices.
- **Omega-3 Fatty Acids.** Claim – omega-3 fatty acids improve heart health, and new research indicates they may reduce the risk of some cancers, depression and neurological disorders. Omega-3s are found in cold water, oily fish such as salmon, herring, mackerel, and sardines. They are also found in walnuts, and canola, olive, flaxseed and soybean oils.
- **Creatine.** Claim – creatine can enhance muscle building and increase “bulk;” it is primarily used for enhancement of explosive movements such as required in power lifting events. Creatine can be obtained through consumption of meat, poultry, or fish; the body can also make creatine in the liver, kidneys and pancreas.
- **Whey.** Claim – Whey is high in BCAA, is quickly absorbed and decreases muscle break down. Whey is a milk-based protein; therefore you can get the same amount of BCAA from 16 oz. of milk as you can one scoop of whey.

Things to consider:

If you are thinking about starting on a nutritional supplement or already taking nutritional supplements, here are a few things to consider:

1. Be aware of potential medication interactions. Even common vitamins can impact the effectiveness of medications. Always talk with your healthcare provider before taking a new supplement.
2. Know the dosing recommendations. Review the recommended dose/amount; exceeding this amount or “stacking” multiple supplements can lead to adverse health outcomes.
3. Ensure the mandatory information is available on the packaging. Per federal regulations the label must contain the following components:

- a. Statement indicating it is a “supplement” and name of the supplement

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b. Name/place of business of manufacturer, packer, or distributor

c. Complete list of ingredients

d. Content (# of pills)

e. Supplement facts panel

4. Watch for false or misleading claims. Many times you will see the terms “natural” or “herbal” giving the impression of healthy or healthful product. The packaging must have the following Food and Drug Administration (FDA) disclaimer: “This statement has not been evaluated by the FDA. This product is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease.”

5. Know the risks. There is no guarantee of quality, purity, composition, safety, or effectiveness of dietary supplements and therefore the possibility exists that it contains banned or harmful substances that are not declared on the label.

6. Choose wisely. The Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center strongly recommends that if you are choosing a dietary supplement, look for products with third-party verification programs as they validate quality/safe manufacturing practices:

- o [United States Pharmacopeia \(USP\)](#)

- o [NSF International](#)

- o [Informed-Choice](#)

7. Be informed. Just because a product is sold on a military installation does not mean it is a DoD approved supplement. If the product has not been banned/recalled by the FDA, Federal Trade Commission or Drug Enforcement Agency, it is not banned by DoD at large, however, each base, command and even unit has the authority to issue guidance on dietary supplements for their service members. Check with your chain of command to determine if there is a local-level policy that impacts you.

When it comes down to it, a diet consisting of five to six small meals per day with a variety of foods, preferably fresh and unprocessed (in their natural state), contains the highest concentration of vitamins, minerals and fiber. The quality sources of protein (which are made up of amino acids), complex carbohydrates (the body’s primary fuel source), and yes even fat (focus on the healthy fats) will give your body what it needs for energy, tissue repair, healthy skin and hair, anti-oxidants for disease prevention, and weight control.

Check out the following resources to determine the safety and/or efficacy of the supplement you are taking or considering taking:

[The Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center](#)

[Human Performance Resource Center’s Operation Supplement Safety](#)

[The Natural Medicine’s Comprehensive Database](#)

1. Bailey R, Gahche J, Miller P, et al. Why US Adults Use Dietary Supplements. JAMA Intern Med. 2013;173(5):355-361. <http://archinte.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?>

articleid=1568520. Accessed June 18, 2013.

2. U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Q&A on dietary supplements. http://www.fda.gov/Food/DietarySupplements/QADietarySupplements/default.htm#what_is. Updated May 21, 2013. Accessed June 17, 2013.

3. National Institute of Health: Office of Dietary Supplements. Dietary supplements: What you need to know. http://ods.od.nih.gov/pubs/DS_WhatYouNeedToKnow.pdf. Reviewed June 17, 2011. Accessed June 19, 2013.

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paul smith

Nice post! Supplements are very important for bodybuilders because they do not get sufficient amount of necessary nutrition and minerals from normal daily diet. I am also consuming supplement of USPlabs that is one of the famous brand in the world of supplements. It really helps me to achieving my goal in a well manner and in short time duration. I generally use whey proteins for improving my muscles mass and the best source I like is dairy products. If you want more information on different type of supplements then you can visit: -

■ vkremer

Paul,

Thank you for your comment. Supplements are very important, especially for people who do not get their nutrition from the foods they eat. Nutrients should always come from food sources first (if possible), but sometimes it does not happen due to a variety of factors.

Thanks again!

Valerie Kremer